



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

BOARD OF ELECTION COMMISSIONERS

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Lesley Waxman

To: Robert W. Healy, City Manager

From: Tanya L. Ford, Executive Director

Date: November 22, 2010

Re: Response to Council Order #O-1 (See attached)

In response to Council Order #O-1, I report the following:

There were numerous complaints received by the Election Commission on November 2nd, Election Day regarding inactive status, incorrect registration information, inconsistencies, misspelled names and inactive status. The staff spoke with each complainant and or election worker clarifying and resolving each issue. The office is required by law to investigate and make correction whenever informed of an error on the voting list.

Some of the instances of incorrect information were a result not updating registration information and/or neglect in returning census materials. Several voters were instructed to complete a Mail-In Voter Registration form (available at the polls) to update information or register and/or follow up with the Commission the same day (Election Day) or shortly thereafter. However, of the amount of resident complaints received, very few voters have followed up with this office to date. Others were instructed to register in the city/town in which they now reside. Once the Election Commission was notified of an error, an investigation occurred, the correction was made and a letter was generated and sent to the voter to confirm the change.

We must also account for human error. The Commission continues to review its outreach and registration activities with hopes of developing an error free system. Unfortunately, we cannot account for errors made by other registration agencies, student organizations, community groups, private entities etc. over which we have no control. This office has encountered submission of incomplete registration forms, submission of forms after the registration deadline and reports by individuals claiming to have registered through an outside organization registration drive and whose forms were never sent to or received by the Commission.

The Election Commission has conducted Voter Registration Training Sessions over the years for which participation has dwindled. It is held for those interested in conducting voter registration in the Cambridge Community. The Commission assists them in understanding what their obligation is with regard to voter registration. Information is provided on frequently asked questions regarding voting, voter qualifications and how to correctly fill out voter registration forms. The event was publicized and a letter and/or press release was sent to city offices, community organizations, clinics, CHA offices, bookstores, schools, post offices, libraries, churches etc. The Commission held a training session on September 20, 2010 for which one person attended.

In regard to removing Cambridge residents from the active voter list and placing them on the inactive list through the city census, the Election Commission follows statutory requirements of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, M.G.L. Chapter 51 s. 4. and M.G.L. Chapter 51 s.10A, which mandate the method for collecting information from residents and multi-unit dwellings each year through the city census. Voters whose current residence is not confirmed through the census and whose names, therefore, are not included in the annual Street List, are put on the Inactive Voting List. They are mailed a “confirmation notice” pursuant to M.G.L Chapter 51 s. 37. Making them inactive is required by law. I have also determined that some voters habitually neglect to answer the census and then re-activate themselves by voting at the next election.

It is my understanding that the annual City Census is widely publicized, signs are posted around the city, and the census is mailed to the known address of every city resident. Included on the annual census form is the following statement:

“Warning – failure to respond to this mailing shall result in removal from the active voting list and may result in removal from the voter registration rolls”

Notice is always given through an individual mailing to each voter and/or resident including those of record in multi-units when census information has not been provided by the individual or by management of the multi-units. Although the Commission sends individual household forms to residents in multi-units, the landlord/management company is still required to submit the information to the Commission. During the 2011 City Census I will review the response and hopefully develop a solution to the issues related to “management companies of large buildings not treating census forms appropriately”. However, as I understand this problem has been an ongoing issue. Currently, the City of Cambridge has approximately 62,852 registered voters and 14,931 inactive voters.

Year	# of Inactive Voters
11/4/2008	14,038
11/3/2009	14,728
11/2/2010	14,931

In conclusion, when there are questions and/or concerns regarding registration and voting eligibility (i.e. inactive status) the Commission should be contacted and the following should be considered:

- Was the voter registration form filled out correctly?
- Did the voter answer the city census?
- Did the voter respond to the confirmation cards sent out prior to the production of the Street List Book?
- Did the voter move within Cambridge and not re-register?
- Did the voter move outside of Cambridge?
- Was the registration information provided in clear and concise manner?
- Did the voter receive a poll notification card in the mail prior to the election?
- Did they register or re-register before or after the voter registration deadline for the state election? (20 days prior to the election, which was October 13th for the 2010 State Election)
- When registering did the voter use a mailing or residential address?
- Did the voter receive a registration acknowledgment letter or receipt after registering to vote? Did they follow-up?
- Where or with whom did they register to vote? (RMV, school registration drives, private entities etc. or governmental, nongovernmental, private entities and organized voter)
- Was the voter registration processed correctly and/or sent to the Cambridge Election Commission in a timely manner or at all?

There is also information addressing how to stay on the voting list in the Cambridge Election Commission Voter Registration Manual and on the Election Commission website. (See attached) The Commission is in also the process of reviewing the website and plans to include more information regarding the census.



Election Commission > FAQ > Voter Registration FAQ

Voter Registration FAQ

Answers to frequently asked questions about registering to vote in the City of Cambridge including name, address and party changes, registration deadlines and locations, and polling locations.

Who may register to vote in Cambridge?

You may register to vote in Cambridge if you are a US citizen, a resident of Cambridge, and will be at least 18 years old on or before Election Day.

Can I register for a friend, family member, or another individual?

No, this is prohibited under state law.

Where do I register?

The following options are available to register to vote. You can register:

At the Election Commission Office during regular and special office hours.

By Mail-in Registration Form. Forms are available at the Election Office, local libraries, branches of the Post Office, Cambridge Hospital and the neighborhood health clinics, public housing locations, and many other city locations. Fill out the form and mail it back to the Election Office.

To have a Registration form mailed to you, you can fill out the request form. Or you can call 1-800-462-vote or 617-727-2828, or request it on the web
<http://www.state.ma.us/sec/ele/elestu/stuidx.htm>

You may also use the federal voter registration form, which is available at the State web site.

Can I register if I am homeless?

Homeless persons can use a shelter address or their prior address in Cambridge if that was the last place of residency. You can also vote from a location by using the diagram on the registration form.

Is identification required to register to vote?

When you register, you must include your driver's license number or the last 4 digits of your social security number on the application. If the information cannot be verified or you do not provide this information, you must provide identification at your polling location when you go to vote. Sufficient identification includes a copy of current and valid photo identification, current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck or other government document showing your name and address.

How do I change my political party?

Send correspondence stating it is "signed under the penalty of perjury" to the Election office with your request to change party affiliation, including what you would like your new affiliation to be. Voters who wish to change their party status may also use mail-in registration forms.

How do I change my address for voting?

If moving to another city or town, re-registration is required if you wish to remain a voter. If moving within the City of Cambridge, send signed correspondence to the Commission stating your new address along with your former address. Mail-in registration forms may also be used to inform the Commission of the new address.

How do I change my name for voting?

Send signed correspondence to the Election office informing the Commission of the name change. Be sure to include both your former name and new name. Mail-in registration forms can also be used to inform the Commission of a name change.

When is the Election Commission office open to the public?

We are normally open on the following hours: Mondays 8:30am – 8:00pm, Tuesdays through Thursdays 8:30am – 5:00pm, and Fridays 8:30am to 12:00 noon. We are closed on holidays recognized by the City. We are open on certain special days and certain special hours to accommodate voter registration deadlines and absentee voting. See Election Calendar for special hours.

When am I registered to vote?

You are registered to vote on the day you register in person at an official designated office or the postmark date on a mail in registration form. You must register by 20 days before an election to vote in that election. You should receive an acknowledgement notice within two to three weeks after you register. If you do not receive your acknowledgement notice, contact the Election Commission.

How may I verify that I am registered?

You may contact the Election Commission at (617) 349-4361.

What is my ward and precinct?

The ward and precinct determines where residents vote and in which elective district citizens reside. When you register to vote, the acknowledgement notice you receive includes your ward, precinct, and polling location. The staff can also provide information about elective districts, your current elected officials, and names of candidates in election seasons.

When can I register?

Eligible persons can register at any time during the Election Office's hours of operation or when outside sessions are conducted. Registration by mail can be done at any time.

Is there a deadline to register?

One may register to vote at any time. However, the deadline to register for any given election is twenty days prior to that election.

What is my polling location?

Your polling location is where you vote. You may click this link to see your polling location (PDF):

Your ward and precinct will determine your polling location. You may also call the Election Commission at (617) 349-4361.

How do I stay on the voting list?

Answering the city census each year ensures that your name will remain on the voting list once you have registered. If you move within the city, inform the Election Commission in writing about your change of address (see "How do I change my address for voting?"). If you were previously registered in another city or town, re-registration from the new address is necessary. You may also inform the Commission if your name changes and you wish to change it for the voting list. Massachusetts state law does not require that you vote in order to keep your name on the voting list.

How can I get a letter verifying that I am a registered voter?

Voter registration letters or cards are not necessary for voting purposes. However, you may go to the Election Commission office and make a request for a letter verifying that you are a registered voter. A \$2.00 fee is charged for issuing a voter registration letter. You may also mail a receipt along with a check of \$2.44 (fee and postage) made payable to the City of Cambridge.

How can my group or organization request voter registration forms in bulk?
Call the Elections Division at 1-800-462-VOTE or 617-727-2828.

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